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ABSTRACT

This study sought to determine the effect of a newly adopted school-based discipline policy on student office referrals for discipline. Subjects were 26 teachers and 494 elementary students of lower socioeconomic status at Beaverbrook Elementary School in Spalding County, Georgia. A school-wide, systematic discipline policy was implemented for the 1993-94 school year, in place of previous disciplinary policies developed and implemented individually by each teacher or administrator. In the event of a fight, theft, or other "major offense," the teacher could refer the student directly to the administration. For minor offenses, the policy made teachers the first line of defense. Before a teacher could refer a minor discipline problem to the administration, he or she had to contact the parents about the problem. The policy resulted in all discipline categories decreasing or showing improvement during the 1993-94 school year compared to the 1992-93 school year. The difference in two of the categories was statistically significant, while the remaining three categories were not. The paper concludes that the discipline policies were effective in decreasing office referral for disciplinary reasons, and recommends that the policies be continued and combined with proactive measures in order to continue to improve the discipline climate of the school. (Contains 14 references.) (JDD)

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ED 378 137

THE EFFECT OF A SCHOOL-BASED DISCIPLINE POLICY ON THE NUMBER OF STUDENT OFFICE REFERRALS

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Abstract

Statement of the Problem

The number of office referrals for discipline problems at Beaverbrook Elementary School during the 1992-93 school year was causing a loss in instructional time for teachers and time-off task for students. The purpose of this research was to determine the effect of a newly adopted school-based discipline policy on student office referrals for discipline.

Procedures

The subjects who took part in this study were 26 teachers and 494 K-5 students of lower socio-economic status at Beaverbrook Elementary School in Spalding County. A discipline committee was established to oversee the development of discipline policies for the school. Data from the 1992-93 school year on discipline referrals, in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, repeat referrals, and the number of office referrals receiving administrative counseling were compared with data collected during the 1993-94 school year.

Analysis

A t-test for independent groups was used to determine if the differences between the 1992-93 data and the 1993-94 data were statistically significant.

Results

All discipline categories decreased or showed improvement during the 1993-94 school year when compared to the 1992-93 school year. The difference in two (2) of the categories was statistically significant, while the remaining three (3) were not. The t-score for office referrals was 2.88 ($p < .05$). The t-score for in-school suspensions was 3.26 ($p < .05$).

Conclusions

The authors concluded that the discipline policies which had been adopted by the staff prior to the start of the 1993-94 school year were effective in decreasing office referrals for disciplinary reasons. They recommended that the policies be continued and combined with proactive measures in order to continue to improve the discipline climate of the school. They also suggested that the discipline committee get input from the entire staff and review the policies annually.

THE EFFECT OF A SCHOOL-BASED DISCIPLINE POLICY ON THE NUMBER OF STUDENT OFFICE REFERRALS

Introduction

What happens to student discipline when a school has had four principals and five assistant principals in seven (7) years? Beaverbrook Elementary School is a case study of that scenario. The administrative staff at Beaverbrook was stable until 1986, when the principal who had been there for many years retired. Since 1986, Beaverbrook has had four principals and five assistant principals. The teaching staff has also gone through changes in personnel. A new elementary school opened in 1991, and 14 teachers left Beaverbrook to continue their careers at the new school. The new school also took 200 of Beaverbrook's students, which caused a decrease in certified personnel. The teaching staff was reduced from 37 during the 1990-91 school year to 26 during the 1991-92 school year.

The area affected most by the lack of continuity in personnel was school discipline. Discipline procedures and philosophy seemed to change with each change in administration. By the 1991-92 school term, no school-wide, systematic discipline procedures were in place. Each teacher was left to select the philosophy and technique that worked best for him or her. This further increased the lack of consistency in dealing with discipline. Inconsistency decreased the trust between students, teachers and the administration. Complaints were common from students, parents, and teachers that the same offense did not result in similar consequences. This lack of consistency and planning in dealing with student discipline became a major concern. Office referrals were frequent because teachers were unsure of how to handle continuing behavior problems.

Investigating ways to bring about consistent and clear procedures for dealing with student discipline at Beaverbrook was very important to the school. Lack of student discipline was having a negative impact on the morale of the teaching staff. Discipline procedures which were concise and effective were needed in order to limit the amount of instructional time lost because of student discipline problems.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to develop a course of action for Beaverbrook that would bring about a decrease in the number of office referrals for students with discipline problems and in the number of repeat office referrals. Hopefully, this course of action would also decrease the number of students receiving administrative counseling, in-school suspension, and out-of-school suspension.

Significance of the Study

Time spent disciplining students is time wasted from the instructional process. Also, according to Bulach, Malone, and Castleman (1994), discipline problems detract from the overall climate of the school, and a poor school climate can have serious implications for student achievement. If the discipline problems at Beaverbrook Elementary School are dealt with, there should be a positive impact on discipline, increased time on task, higher student achievement, and a better school climate.

Dealing with student discipline problems takes away from the instructional time of teachers and ties up time that administrators could be spending on other areas of school improvement. Much has been written on the subject of student discipline, and it has been a concern of educators since formal education began. In order for a school to be effective, sound procedures for dealing with student discipline must be in place.

Review of Literature

The review of literature will deal with the following topics: the public's perception of discipline, solutions to discipline problems, difficulties in improving discipline, and methods of improving discipline.

The Publics Perception of Discipline

Student discipline problems receive a significant amount of attention from educators and the general public (Brown & Payne, 1988; Baker, 1985; Gottfredson, 1984). Brown and Payne (1988) cited discipline problems such as poor motivation and lack of parental support as being more of an everyday problem for educators than drug use or violence against teachers. According to Wayson (1985), violence and criminal activities that occur at school are a separate issue from student discipline and should not be grouped and confused with student discipline problems. Wayson believes that many times when criminal acts occur at school they are used to propagate the idea that most schools today lack effective discipline. This helps to foster the public opinions already noted by Brown and Payne, Baker, and Gottfredson. A pervasive student discipline problem may result in harm to students and teachers, restrict student learning, lead to educators leaving the field, and foster student delinquency in and out of school (Clegg, 1984). It is the opinion of the authors that while there may be a discipline problem in some public schools, it is the media coverage of violent acts which impact the public's perception of school discipline.

Solutions to Discipline Problems

Many programs for improving student discipline have become available to educators. Some of the solutions have come from experts in the field of education. Expertise may be marketed in the form of commercial products that can be purchased and implemented in the classroom or on the school or system level. Sometimes staff development training is included. Among the most popular of these are Lee Canter's Assertive Discipline, Madeline Hunter's behavior management system, and William Glasser's Schools Without Failure (Meyers and Pawlas, 1989). Others cited by Gary (1981) include Thomas Gordon's conflict resolution and Rudolph Breiker's goals of misbehavior.

Numerous other solutions for student discipline problems have been proposed and they vary widely on method. Stewart Purkey (1986) and James Burns (1985) both focus on changing the culture of the school in order to attack the problem of student discipline. Both believe strong administrative leadership and commitment from all involved are prerequisites for success. Gaustad (1992) also cites quality leadership as being vital. Perhaps the best illustration of this comes from Clegg (1984) in his citing of the case study of George Washington Preparatory High School in Los Angeles. This school was transformed from a chaotic group of teenagers into a school of achievement within a five year period, and this turn-around could be attributed to the change in leadership.

Difficulties in Dealing with Student Discipline

One of the difficulties that can be encountered when dealing with student discipline concerns the legal aspects of violating student rights when a student is reprimanded. The fear of litigation has forced many school systems and schools to develop written policies for dealing with discipline that are complex, highly-structured and which read like legal papers (Sacken, 1989). According to Sacken, this leads to very little autonomy for individual schools and their personnel. For example, Public Law 94-142 concerns how special education students are educated. Many

times special education students can pose unique and difficult challenges when it comes to discipline. The Executive Committee of the Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders (1989) proposed that flexible discipline policies are the best way to deal with these students. Rigid and strict enforcement of policy without taking into account this group's special circumstances may lead to violation of federal law and to litigation.

Methods of Improving Student Discipline

One of the most promising methods of improving student discipline in schools appears to be that suggested by Gottfredson (1984) and Lordon (1983) concerning assessing the school's discipline climate by administering an "Effective School Battery." After discovering the true situation of the school's discipline climate, goals and procedures for improvement can be set and implemented. Evaluation occurs periodically to determine effectiveness and to initiate more changes. Lordon (1983) also believes in assessing the school's discipline climate in order to get a total perspective on discipline. Both of these proposals require a great deal of involvement on the part of administration and teachers.

Educators may choose to develop their own school discipline procedures for the unique environment that exists in their school. Jones (1984) cites 12 factors that educators must include when developing a building-level discipline program. These factors include developing a staff philosophy on student discipline and developing a plan on how to best carry out that philosophy. Close work between the teachers and the administration is considered a necessity. Jones believes a school will have the most success when the factors he presents are considered and used to develop a school-based plan.

Meyers and Pawlas (1989) give perhaps the best procedures for administrators to follow when instituting a school discipline program. They discuss discipline and how it relates to the leadership role of the principal and what a principal must do to develop effective student discipline. They give detailed recommendations and instructions for a principal to consider, such as being noticeable, getting input from all involved parties, informing students and parents in writing, and stressing student self-control. Meyers and Pawlas insist that the best plans are those that are made by the individual school implementing them.

Summary of Research

The research indicates that student discipline is a major concern of educators and the general public. Schools cannot be effective when an inordinate amount of time is spent on student discipline. Student discipline can be improved by having strong leadership, by changing the culture of the school, and by assessing the needs of the school and making logical improvements. However, the greatest improvement in student discipline will occur when the staff of a school takes responsibility for improving the school's discipline and develops its own plan within the framework suggested by research. Consequently, in this study it was decided that the entire staff would be involved in developing a comprehensive set of policies designed to improve discipline and to provide consistency in enforcing infractions of the policies. It was hypothesized that as a result of the implementation of a set of school-based discipline policies the following would occur.

1. the number of office referrals would decrease.
2. the number of repeat office referrals would decrease.
3. the number of office referrals resulting in administrative counseling would decrease.
4. the number of office referrals resulting in in-school suspension would decrease.

5. the number of office referrals resulting in out-of-school suspension would decrease.

Research Methodology

The subjects for this study were the students and faculty of Beaverbrook Elementary School. During the 93-94 school year Beaverbrook Elementary School had 494 students in kindergarten through fifth grade. There were 78 kindergarten students, 94 first grade students, 85 second grade students, 73 third grade students, 79 fourth grade students, 76 fifth grade students, and 9 self-contained special education students. The student body was 58% male and 95% Caucasian. The racial make-up of the other 5% of the population consisted of African-American students with the exception of two Asian-Americans, who made up less than one-half of one percent. The socioeconomic level of the students was somewhat diverse, but most students fell in or between the low to lower-middle economic levels. About 40% of the students lived in one of the four large mobile home communities within the school zone.

The faculty of Beaverbrook consisted of 26 classroom teachers, two administrators, a counselor, a media specialist, and itinerant resource teachers. The 26 classroom teachers were divided into grade levels according to the following: four kindergarten teachers, five first grade teachers, four second grade teachers, four third grade teachers, three fourth grade teachers, three fifth grade teachers, one music teacher, one physical education teacher, and one teacher of self-contained mildly-intellectually handicapped students.

The teaching staff was an experienced one with only five teachers having less than five years of teaching experience. No teacher was in his or her first year of teaching. Six teachers had between five and ten years of teaching experience, four teachers had between ten and fifteen years of teaching experience, and eleven teachers had over fifteen years of teaching experience.

The teaching staff was considered to have an advanced level of education. Eleven out of the 26 classroom teachers had earned a master's degree or higher in the field of education. Fifty percent of the certified personnel at Beaverbrook held advanced degrees in education. Seven of these had completed specialist's course work. The staff was made up of 24 white females, three black females, two white males, and one black male.

The data that were used to evaluate the effectiveness of the discipline policies were the number of office referrals for student discipline problems. The number of office referrals for the first five months of the 1992-93 school year were compared to the number of office referrals for the first five months of the 1993-94 school year. Bus referrals were not included because a system-wide policy covers procedures dealing with these. The discipline referrals for the 1992-93 school year were used as the comparison data to determine if the new discipline policies created a significant change in the data for the 93-94 school year. The data on office referrals for each grade were recorded on a chart. The chart was divided into monthly columns showing the breakdown of referrals for each grade level, the type of punishment administered, and the number of repeat referrals.

Before the start of the 1993-94 school year, a discipline committee was formed at Beaverbrook Elementary School. The committee was made up of one administrator, one counselor, and one teacher from each grade level, including two at-large members. The committee met to discuss the discipline needs of their school and to select the discipline goals for the 1993-94 school year. The committee reviewed literature on discipline along with selected examples of school discipline programs. The committee designed school discipline policies for Beaverbrook,

and these were adopted by the faculty for implementation during the 1993-94 school term. The policies established the philosophy and procedures that the faculty of Beaverbrook would follow concerning student discipline. The committee held a workshop discussing the use of the policy for the faculty. The committee also presented the policy to the students during an assembly program and sent written copies home for all parents. During the first PTA meeting, the policy was presented to the community. See Appendix A for a copy of the policy.

This was the first year for a written policy on discipline. In the past, each referral was dealt with on an individual basis by the teacher or administrator involved. There was no set policy or procedure to use as a guide.

The effectiveness of Beaverbrook's new discipline policy was determined by performing a t-test for independent groups on the "pre-policy data" and "post-policy data" in order to analyze the significance of the differences between the two groups. For example, the number of office referrals, the number of repeat office referrals, and the number of office referrals resulting in administrative counseling, in-school suspension, and out-of-school suspension for the 1992-93 school year were compared to those from the 1993-94 school year.

Results

Office referrals for September through January for the 1992-1993 school year and for September through January for the 1993-94 school year were obtained. The number of office referrals; the number of repeat office referrals; the number of referrals that resulted in administrative counseling; the number of referrals that resulted in in-school suspension; and the number of referrals that resulted in out-of-school suspension were tabulated for each month for both years. The 1993-94 numbers were compared to the 1992-93 numbers through the use of t-tests for independent groups.

Number of Referrals and Results 1992-93 and 1993-94 by months

Month	Year	Referrals	Repeat	Counseling	In-School	Out-School
Sept.	1992-93	70	25	40	22	8
	1993-94	48	17	38	8	2
Oct.	1992-93	66	27	32	27	5
	1993-94	52	25	34	14	3
Nov.	1992-93	75	41	26	36	10
	1993-94	49	23	33	13	2
Dec.	1992-93	50	24	30	18	2
	1993-94	42	21	19	18	2
Jan.	1992-93	52	21	22	24	5
	1993-94	47	22	23	17	5

The results of the t-tests showed that hypotheses number one and four were supported. The implementation of a school-based discipline policy did decrease the number of office referrals and did decrease the number of office referrals resulting in in-school suspension. Examination of the data through the use of t-tests yielded a t-score of 2.88 ($p < .05$) for office referrals. The decrease in office referrals was statistically significant. The t-test for the number of referrals resulting in in-school suspension yielded a t-score of 3.26 ($p < .05$). The decrease in the number of referrals resulting in in-school suspension was statistically significant.

Totals 1993-93 and 1993-94
With T-Values and Probability Results

	1992-93	1993-94	t-value	probability
Referrals	313	238	2.86	P=.02
Repeaters	138	108	1.60	P=.15
Counseling	150	147	.13	P=.90
In-school	127	70	3.26	P=.01
Out-of-school	30	14	2.14	P=.06

Hypotheses two, three, and five were not supported. The number of repeat office referrals, the number of referrals resulting in out-of-school suspension, and the number of referrals resulting in administrative counseling all showed a decrease in 1993-94 as compared to 1992-93. However, the decreases were not significant enough to state that the difference could be attributed entirely to the implementation of the school-based discipline policy. The t-score for the decrease in repeat referrals was 1.30 ($p > .05$). The t-score for the decrease in out-of school suspensions was 2.14 ($p > .05$). The t-score for the decrease in administrative counseling was .13 ($p > .05$).

Discussion

The implementation of the school-based discipline policy at Beaverbrook Elementary School did bring about a significant decrease in the number of office referrals and in the number of referrals resulting in in-school suspension. While the number of repeat office referrals and the number of referrals resulting in administrative counseling and out-of-school suspension did not show a significantly different decline, the decline was nevertheless substantial. The amount of time spent by the administration disciplining students had decreased considerably.

One part of the policy which was warmly received by the faculty allowed teachers to refer students directly to the office for all major offenses. For example, in the event of a fight, theft or other behavior described as a "major offense," the teacher could refer the student directly to the administration.

It was the belief of the administration that the major factor in reducing the number of referrals was the policy which made teachers the first line of defense in resolving most discipline infractions. Before a teacher could refer a discipline problem to the administration, he or she had

to contact the parents about the problem. It was believed that this procedure accounted for most of the decrease in referrals. It is quite possible that the number of referrals decreased and the number of discipline problems the teacher had did not. Reducing discipline problems as opposed to reducing referrals must also be addressed in the future.

Finally, although office referrals did decrease, a more significant overall change for the better could have resulted if proactive measures were added to the policy. This discipline policy was reactive in nature, mainly stressing the consequences of negative behavior. The policy could be improved by adding techniques that teach appropriate behavior. This could include teaching students the correct procedures for lining up and moving throughout the building and perhaps teaching students how to think through situations before reacting to them.

Overall, this study had a positive impact on the school. The number of office referrals did decrease. More importantly, however, a program designed to improve discipline was put in place where one had not been present before. This became a foundation upon which to build. The findings of this study were presented to the discipline committee of the school. It was recommended that the committee discuss the results, evaluate the effectiveness of the policy through the use of other criteria, and make any changes deemed necessary.

Limitations

One of the limitations of this study was the fact that the two groups compared were independent in their makeup. In the 1993-94 school year, new students in the kindergarten grade level were present and the fifth grade students from the year before had been promoted. Additionally, students moved in and out of the school throughout the two years. Also, teachers had gained another year of experience which may have made them better at managing discipline problems.

Conclusion

In summary, it is evident from the results of the t-test that the implementation of a school-based discipline policy did bring about a decrease in the number of office referrals when the 1993-94 numbers were compared to the 1992-93 numbers. The discipline policy was effective. If an aggressive, proactive program is designed that compliments the policy, the number of office referrals and discipline problems should continue to decrease.

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APPENDIX A

Beaverbrook Elementary School

Discipline Policy

1993-94

Developing a positive school climate involves the use of natural, logical, and realistic consequences; a simple structure; reasonable rules; as well as the labeling and accepting of feelings. The students themselves play an important role in their own educational programming. In such an atmosphere the class is neither teacher-dominated nor student controlled; rather, it is a joint effort to learn, relate, and experience.

Our method of discipline shows the students these things (1) What they have done wrong. (2) How to solve the problems they created. (3) How to assume responsibility for their own actions. The staff at Beaverbrook believes that instruction should occur in an environment that is conducive to learning. Effective instruction requires good order and discipline which may be described as the absence of distractions, friction, and disturbances which interfere with the effective functioning of the student, class, and school. Our positive school climate was developed to assist faculty and administrators in maintaining a satisfactory environment. Minor offenses should be handled on the spot, while referring to the following guidelines:

NO ONE HAS THE RIGHT TO
injure self or others;
damage or destroy property (students are responsible for books issued to them);
discriminate against others;
impose on others;
interfere with others; or
misrepresent information.

"ACTIONS THAT FIT"
There's a time to run, and a time to walk.
There's a time for silence, and a time for talk.
There's a time for work, and a time for play.
There's a time for sleep at the close of day.
There's a time for everything you do,
For children and grown-ups to.
A time to stand up and time to sit,
But see that the time and the action fit!

OFFENSES

1. FAILURE TO FOLLOW DIRECTIONS OF A TEACHER OR SCHOOL PERSONNEL

2. EXCESSIVE DISTRACTION OF OTHER STUDENTS
   Any conduct and/or behavior which is disruptive to the orderly educational process in the

classroom or any similar grouping for instruction. Examples: talking excessively, making noises, provoking or harassing other students, interrupting class functions, etc.

3. DESTROYING DISPLAYED MATERIALS

4. RUNNING WITHOUT GOOD REASON

5. JUMPING AND TOUCHING THE DOOR FRAME, CLOCKS AND/OR BANNERS.

CONSEQUENCES

FIRST OFFENSE - Documentation by teacher

SECOND OFFENSE - Note sent home to parents - Students will write an Action Plan with consequences for inappropriate behavior. This will be done in another teacher's room. (30 minutes)

THIRD OFFENSE - Office referral, call to parents/guardians by administrator

FOURTH OFFENSE - **REQUIRED** parental conference.

FIFTH OFFENSE - Conference with student, parent/guardian, administrator, and discipline committee. Disciplinarian action will be decided by the group.

MAJOR OFFENSES

1. OFFENSIVE TOUCHING OF ANOTHER STUDENT

2. USE OF PROFANE OR OBSCENE LANGUAGE OR GESTURES

3. DEFIANCE OF AUTHORITY/DISRESPECT TO STAFF MEMBER
   (Any verbal or non-verbal conduct and/or behavior directed toward a teacher or staff member that is rude or discourteous.)

4. THREATS
   (The intentional threat by word or act to do harm to another student, coupled with the apparent ability to carry out the threat.)

5. INTENTIONALLY PROVIDING FALSE INFORMATION TO SCHOOL PERSONNEL
   (Forgery of parents'/guardians' names; providing false information to parents/guardians such as changing grades, forging notes, passes, or forms - **PARENTS WILL BE NOTIFIED IMMEDIATELY!**

6. BATTERY UPON ANOTHER STUDENT
   (The actual causing of bodily harm to another student, including pushing, tripping, or striking another student.)

7. FIGHTING
   (Any physical conflict between two or more individuals. If there is overwhelming evidence that one party physically attacked the other, then the victim's consequences may be reduced or eliminated.)

8. STEALING - THEFT
   (Taking and/or carrying away of public or personal property.)

9. POSSESSION OF WEAPONS

10. POSSESSION OF ILLEGAL SUBSTANCES

11. EXTORTION
   (Verbally or by written or printed communication, threatening injury to the person, property, or reputation or another, with the intent to extort money or other property from another, or with the intent to compel the person so threatened, or any other person, to do any act or refrain from doing any act against his or her will.)

12. ANY OTHER OFFENSE DEEMED APPROPRIATE BY THE ADMINISTRATION

CONSEQUENCES

FIRST OFFENSE - Office referral, call to parents/guardians by administrator.

SECOND OFFENSE - REQUIRED parental conference.

THIRD OFFENSE - Conference with student, parent/guardian, administrator and discipline committee. Disciplinarian action will be decided by the committee.

KINDERGARTEN STUDENTS

The kindergarten year is considered an opportunity for students to be trained in and learn about the Code of Conduct and consequences. Their discipline will vary based upon developmental considerations as determined by the kindergarten teacher and principal.

Kindergarten students will not be subject to assessment of various offenses except parental notification unless it is determined by the teacher and principal that their disruption is severe enough to warrant it.

ACTION PLAN - When the child goes for 30 school days and does not have to write another action plan, he/she will get to tear up all action plans pertaining to him/her. We feel that if the child goes for 30 school days without an offense, he/she is working on correcting his/her problem.